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THE

PERPETUITY

OF

CHRISTIAN BAPTISM.

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From the Annual Assembly to the Churches,

ON THE

Duration or Perpetuity of Baptism,

With some introductory hints

Upon the Subjects and Mode of that Ordinance.

DEAR BRETHREN,

DISTINGUISHED as we are, from other religious denominations by our sentiments concerning Baptism, it behoves us to pay a very particular attention to the objections of our opponents, as well as to the grounds and reasons of our own faith and practice.

Many have objected, and do still object against us for confining the ordinance to *adults*, and denying it to *infants*. To this we reply, by appealing in our own vindication to the *New Testament*, the only book that contains the authentic and binding law, and genuine history of that institution, where adults always appear as its only legitimate and proper subjects, and where there is neither precept nor precedent for infant Baptism any more than for *infant communion*—or even the slightest mention of, or faintest allusion to such a practice any where to be found, from one end of the book to the other. We further urge, in reply to this objection, that the very nature and genius of Christianity evidently confine Baptism, as well as the Lord's Supper, to adults, and necessarily exclude infants from both these ordinances: Christianity being a *personal* matter; a religion propagated by way of *testimony*, or an appeal to the reason, the understanding, or conscience of mankind; and can never really take place, and its ordinances become binding or obligatory, till men appear by their own personal confession, or profession, to understand, approve, and believe it. The whole tenor of the New Testament, (we add) uniformly coincides with, and confirms these positions; and consequently justifies our excluding infants from the ordinances of the Gospel, which evidently belong to those, and to those only who appear to believe and embrace that holy and divine religion.

What is here further objected against us is, "our making *immersion essential* to the due administration of Baptism, or our insisting that this Christian rite can be nothing less than the submersion, dipping, or bathing of the subject in water; while

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the generality of Christians consider sprinkling or pouring as quite sufficient." To this also we urge in reply, that the whole New Testament account or history of the administration of this ordinance, is uniformly and decidedly on our side, so as clearly to support and justify our sentiments on this disputed point.—The ordinance, we say, was originally performed, or administered in JORDAN, the largest river in the whole country, and at ENON, near Salim, because there was much water there. Our Lord, after John had baptized him in Jordan, went up straightway out of the water. Philip and the Eunuch came to a certain water; and they afterwards went into that water, where the latter was baptized; they then came up out of the said water: all plainly indicating, that the performance then spoken of, or the rite then administered could be nothing less than immersion. What is said of this ordinance as representing, or resembling a burial and resurrection, is a further confirmation of the truth, or justness of our sentiments on this subject. In sprinkling or pouring there can be no such resemblance or representation; but the case is evidently and strikingly otherwise as to immersion.—Here we also further urge the testimony of the most eminent lexicographers and critics, who make it appear that the Greek words expressive of this ordinance, signify immersion as plainly and necessarily as even our common English words dip, dipped, dipping, bathe, bathed, bathing, &c. And if any thing were here wanting to constitute a complete demonstration in favour of our practise and way of thinking, we could appeal to the judgment and custom of the Greek Christians, who have always adhered to immersion: a plain and demonstrative proof, that it must be the real and proper signification of the words expressive of Baptism in their language. This ought to settle this controversy, and silence all future objecting on this head; for who can be so likely to know the meaning of Greek words as the Greeks themselves; or who so likely to know the true and proper meaning of those Greek words that relate to Baptism as the Greek Christians, to whose mother tongue, or native language those same words belong? That they do not, and never did, in their opinion, signify sprinkling or pouring, is certain, for they have never adopted such a practice. On the other hand, that they understand, and have always understood immersion to be naturally and necessarily meant by those words, is equally certain, for such has been their constant practice from generation to generation. This circumstance we ought never to overlook or forget while combating the present objection, as it will apply effectually and decisively in support of our sentiment and practice, as well as

against theirs. It surely must appear, if not providential, yet at least exceedingly remarkable, that the Greek Christians, from age to age, should adhere to this practice of immersion, without ever once attempting to lay aside or depart from the same, widely as they have departed from primitive Christianity in a multitude of other matters. How otherwise is it possible to account for this, but by admitting that the Greek words expressive of this ordinance were so clearly and universally understood among the Greeks to signify immersion, that that practice could not be laid aside there for shame, or without insulting and offering violence to the common sense and common feelings of the people? In as much then as the Greeks, who must have been the best judges in the world, considered immersion as the proper native legitimate meaning of the original or Greek word for Baptism, it must be allowed to be really so; for in the face of such a well-known and undeniable fact, who can avoid admitting it, without appearing blind to the clearest evidence and plainest proof, or a slave to the most unreasonable prejudice?

But the objection which it is designed here chiefly to consider and obviate, is that which militates against the duration or perpetuity of this ordinance. The people called Quakers, and many of those who have gone under the name of Socinians have long objected, that Water-Baptism was a mere temporary rite, and ought by no means to be considered as of perpetual obligation, or as a duty incumbent upon any of the inhabitants of Britain or of Christendom; and this notion is said to be now very rapidly gaining ground in this country. Its advocates are ever asserting, that the ordinance doth not extend to the descendants of professing Christians; being neither suitable to their circumstances, nor intended to bind them. "Such as have only doubts concerning the Divine authority of infant Baptism, or have been accustomed to consider it as unauthorized by the Scriptures, are often more apt to fall into this sentiment than to adopt ours. Our notion is the opinion of a small part of the Christian world; and the minds of some revolt from a practical compliance with it, as a kind of tacit intimation that they themselves, hitherto, have not been Christians. But men of candour and good sense should divest themselves of such prejudices; they well know, that popularity is no test of truth—that the time was when the Christians were a sect every where spoken against; and that though their profession of Christianity should have been unequivocal, yet if in any respect it hath not been so complete and full as the Gospel requires it to be, it will be no reflection on their wisdom or piety, to make

up what has been deficient in the expressions of their reverence to the character and authority of Christ."

In support of the notion which we are now combating, it has been frequently pleaded, that the original words in Matt. xxviii. 20. which our common version renders, " unto the end of the world," ought to be rendered, " to the end of the age." Be it so; what then? Why then, they pretend it will follow, that the end of the age must signify the conclusion of the Jewish dispensation, and therefore that the command to baptize could be in force no longer. But this objection will be sufficiently answered and refuted by observing, that it equally effects, or militates against all the other precepts of Christ, and makes the obligation to observe them to terminate at the same time. For the end of the age applies as much to the "all things whatsoever that Christ hath commanded," as it does to Baptism:—and so the objection, if it prove any thing, proves that all the precepts of Christ have ceased to be obligatory or binding on Christians at the dissolution of the Mosaic œconomy, or termination of the Jewish dispensation. It must, surely, be very unreasonable and absurd to suppose, that by the end of the age, our Lord there meant the end of that dispensation, when it was in truth, at an end then, when he spoke the words, and the new or Gospel dispensation was, at the very same time commencing. Nothing, therefore, can well be more natural, evident, and certain, than that by the end of the age is there meant, the end of the Gospel dispensation, or in other words, the end of the world: so that it will thence naturally follow, that Baptism, together with all those other precepts of Christ mentioned along with it in the above passage, do, and will continue to be binding upon Christians till the time of his second advent.

Of the last mentioned passage, as well as that in Mark xvi. 16. others have affirmed that no reference is there had to Water-Baptism, but only to that of the spirit, which they are pleased to call, by way of pre-eminence, the Baptism of Christ. But to this it seems a very sufficient reply, that the Apostles understood the words of those passages as relating to Water-Baptism, and practised accordingly; and that whenever they speak of the Baptism of the Spirit, they do not refer to the above passages, as containing any declaration, or the least indication concerning it, but appear to have in view quite another portion of their Master's sayings, and expressed in a very different style. Thus Peter, in his account of what happened in the house of Cornelius, says, " the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I, (not the words of the above mentioned passages, but) " the word of the Lord, how that he said,

" John indeed baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost." The Baptism of the Holy Ghost and of fire, and likewise that of affliction or suffering, are only metaphorical Baptisms, or Baptisms in a figurative sense; and they acquire that name from the ordinance under consideration, or the Christian rite of immersion in water. This being an established ordinance of the Gospel, and forming a leading and prominent part of the Christian service, it was very natural to denominate the extraordinary and superabundant communication of Spiritual gifts, (which took place soon after our Lord's assension) as well as the afflictions and sufferings of Christ and his people, a Baptism: that is, in a metaphorical sense, or by way of allusion to the above mentioned ordinance.

The very style of our Lord's commission, proves that he is not speaking metaphorically: " teach all nations, baptizing them—Preach the Gospel to every creature: he that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved." The language here is very different from what it is when he is speaking of a metaphorical Baptism. Then, as might be expected, he adopts the metaphorical style; he asks his Disciples, " If they can be baptized with the Baptism he is baptized with?" And he says, " With the Baptism I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized." Mark, x. 38, 39. He likewise says, " I have a Baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened (pained, or distressed) till it be accomplished!" Luke, x. 50. And a little before his assension, speaking to his disciples of his Father's promise, which they had heard of him, he says, " Ye shall be baptised with (or in) the Holy Ghost, not many days hence." Acts, i. 5. John the Baptist also, speaking of the additional and superior benefits which our Lord would confer, compared with those derived from his ministry, says, " He shall baptize you with (or in) the Holy Ghost and fire;" referring, no doubt, to the day of Pentecost. In all these passages, a metaphorical Baptism is clearly seen; in the former, a Baptism of pain and suffering, where Christ and his disciples are represented as sinking in deep waters, and overwhelmed by mighty floods; and in the latter, the Baptism of the Spirit, or superabundant communication and enjoyment of spiritual gifts, which took place after our Lord's assension, and resembled a mighty overflowing stream, in which his disciples were immersed and consecrated for his service.—In as much then as our Lord's commission refers to the ordinance of Baptism, or immersion in water, it must follow, that that rite, or ordinance, was certainly enjoined by him upon the primitive Christians. But the question is, how long was it to continue, or remain in force?

The advocates for the notion which we are now combating maintain, that Baptism could be binding only on the first converts from Judaism, Paganism, or any other false religion, and not on their descendants. But the words and obvious tenor of the commission, as recorded by Matthew, manifestly contradict this. Baptism is there most evidently connected with the other precepts of the Gospel, even with those that are confessedly of perpetual obligation; so that they should be allowed to stand or fall together. It is there as clear as any thing need be, that the duty or obligation of Baptism was to continue, like all the other precepts of Christ, in full force, or be binding on all his disciples alway, even to the end of the world, or expiration of the Gospel dispensation. "Teach all nations, baptizing them," said the risen Saviour, to whom all power was given in heaven and on earth: "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo I am with you alway even to the end of the world, Amen."—Here the promise of his presence, aid, and support, to the end of the world, (or that of the present dispensation) is evidently commensurate with the duty or obligation to enforce and observe his precepts:—and Baptism among the rest. Those who hold that Baptism is not binding upon the descendants of Christians, owing to the act or obedience of their progenitors, not only maintain what the Scripture contradicts, but seem also to have quite forgotten that Christianity is a personal religion, and can by no means be taken up by proxy. To suppose that a man may practise evangelical obedience, or observe a Gospel ordinance, for, or in the room and stead of his posterity, so as to supercede the necessity of their doing in their own persons what otherwise would have been their bounden duty, would be to suppose what is evidently repugnant both to the letter and the spirit of the Christian religion.

Personal Christianity originates in the belief of the Gospel; that belief is followed by a confession of the same; and that confession or profession of faith in Christ is evidently connected with, and ought never to be separated from Baptism, in which the believer is solemnly introduced or admitted among the disciples, or visible followers of Christ. This ordinance appears to have been originally observed for the purpose of putting on Christ, or that the persons baptized might thereby take upon them his name: hence we read of being baptized in, or into the name of the Lord Jesus, and of putting on Christ in that ordinance. Act, viii. 16; Gal. iii. 27. Now brethren, this must be the common concern of all Christians; those of the present day, as well as those of the first age; those who are descended

from Christian parents, as well as those who come over to Christianity from Judaism, Paganism, or any other false religion. There is therefore no reason to imagine that the law of Baptism is become obsolete: nor can there be any just reason to distinguish, as to the duty or obligation of being baptized, between the first converts to Christianity and their believing descendants.

Upon the whole, then, as Water-Baptism is in the commission evidently connected with the preaching, the belief, and the profession of the Gospel, we may venture to conclude and assert, that while preaching the Gospel continues to be a duty, it will also continue to be the duty of all who embrace or believe that Gospel, to make a public and solemn confession, or profession of the same, and on that confession or profession to be baptized in, or into the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; thereby signifying that he is their chosen Master, Lord, and Saviour; and they his willing disciples, servants, and subjects.

Among the different passages of Scripture, which those who deny the perpetuity of Baptism have pressed into their service, that in Rom. xi. 16. is one of the most remarkable, "If the root be holy so are the branches." But what can these words have to do with Baptism, any more than with the Lord's Supper? In truth, they have nothing at all to do with either; but evidently refer to quite another matter, even the state and condition of the Jews, or the future calling and conversion of that nation. As well, therefore, might an exemption in behalf of the believing descendants of Christians from the obligation of making a personal profession of their faith in Christ be pleaded from this passage, as that in regard to Baptism.

Another passage which has been forcibly dragged into the same service, is that in 1 Cor. vii. 14. "The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy." From these words it has been argued and insisted upon, "That if one of the parents of any child, and much more, if both its parents be in a state of holiness, or in the profession of Christianity, that child is a Christian, or holy in the sight of God, and entitled to all the privileges of the religion of Jesus Christ, without Baptism." In answer to which it may be observed, not only that the sense here put on the word holy appears very doubtful, if not inadmissible; but also that the passage itself does not speak of Baptism, or any way refer or allude to it; and that whatever conclusion is drawn from it, with respect to the offspring, where one of the parents is a believer, the same holds also with respect to the unbelieving parent, who

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is expressly said to be sanctified, or made holy by the Christian or believing partner. At any rate, this passage cannot affect the question about the perpetuity of Baptism. It is curious enough, however, to see this and the former passage, so often and warmly urged to prove the right of the children of Christian parents to Baptism, alledged as a proof that it is improperly administered to such.* In both cases they appear to be very ill applied: and surely such applications of Scripture can be no better than what the apostle calls, "Handling the word of God deceitfully."

Other passages sometimes employed in this service, (not, indeed, as direct proofs against the perpetuity of Baptism, but rather as proofs of its insignificance, or its being of but small moment,) are, John, iv. 1. where it is observed that, "Christ himself did not baptize;" and 1 Cor. i. 17. where Paul says that, "He was not sent to baptize, but to preach." In answer to which it has been alledged,† that "If the disciples of Christ baptized under his direction, the practice hath the same authority, as if it had been performed by himself. As to the declaration of Paul, it can mean no more than, that to preach was the principal thing he was to do in person:"—to baptize, he might, and did appoint others, who might be fitter than he was for that service; especially, if we may give any credit to the report, that he was himself but a small and feeble man. At the same time it ought to be remembered, that we learn from his own testimony, that he himself sometimes administered this ordinance: which seems very plainly to indicate, that he did not think so very lightly of it, as some of our opponents would have us to imagine. That both the apostle Paul, and our blessed Lord himself, were very far from thinking lightly of Baptism, or deeming its observance dispensable or temporary, may be justly inferred from their own memorable example; for they both paid it the highest honour, by a zealous and solemn compliance with the divine law or precept by which it had been enjoined. Such examples are, surely, highly worthy of our imitation, and ought to confirm and establish our attachment to this venerable and sacred institution.

But no argument, perhaps, has been urged with greater confidence, or deemed more decisive against the perpetuity of Baptism, or for its not being binding on the descendants of Christians, than that which is founded upon a pretended Jewish Baptism, supposed to exist at and before the coming of Christ, and from which it is presumed the Christian ordinance has been

* See Toulmin's Essay on Baptism, note, p. 37.
† Ibid, p. 29.

derived. On this ground the opposers of the perpetuity of Baptism contend, that the practice of Proselyte Baptism, among the Jews, was the rule and model of the Apostles, in regard to the administration of Christian Baptism; and that it must have induced and directed them to understand our Lord's commission, (Matt. xxviii. 19.) as implying, that Baptism was only to be used by those who should be converted to Christianity from a different profession, the pollutions of which were considered as washed away by it. And they assert, that though the children of such converts were to be baptized with their parents, all that descended from them, after they were initiated into the Christian church, were to be considered as baptized in them. "Such, (say they) was the case with the Jewish Proselytes, who were baptized together with their children, upon their admission into the Jewish church; whereas, all those who descended from them afterwards, were looked upon as having no need of Baptism."

To all this it may be replied, 1. That it proceeds altogether on a ground, or principle about which the New Testament is totally silent. Nothing is there so much as hinted, of the Apostles being to follow such a model, or even that there existed such a rite as this pretended Proselyte Baptism: what a work of darkness, therefore, must the managers of this argument have taken upon themselves! 2. No proof has yet appeared from any quarter whatever, of the existence of such a practice among the Jews, either at, or near the time of Christ; which, surely, ought to have been done, to give the argument any degree, or any appearance of weight and force; and till it be actually done, the argument, if it may be so called, is entitled to no reply, and ought to be treated with contempt. 3. Some of the most eminent writers, even among the Pædobaptists, have given up the point, as utterly untenable, and a mere fiction: such as Dr. Owen, Dr. Jennings, and Dr. Lardner; men whose knowledge of Jewish customs and antiquities must have been very extensive, and very accurate, so that it may be very safely concluded, that no such practice or ceremony did really exist among the Jews in our Lord's time. 4. Dr. Gale also, and Dr. Gill, among the Baptists, have gone upon the same grounds, and denied that there existed such a rite as the Baptism of Proselytes among the Jews, in John the Baptist's, or our Lord's time, and even long, very long after that period. The latter (Dr. Gill) has elaborately and fully investigated that question, in his "Dissertation concerning the Baptism of Jewish Proselytes," published by Keith, in 1771; where he makes it appear, that there are no traces whatever to be met with in Jewish writings, of such a baptismal rite existing among that people,

till several hundred years after the death of Christ; and then it appears, and is to be classed among their most stupidly senseless inventions and corruptions. To this dissertation no writer on the other side has ever yet attempted a reply; so that the fact may be concluded to be incontrovertible. This being the case, we may safely venture to look upon this ancient-jewish-proselyte-Baptism as a mere Jewish fable, an idle figment, totally unworthy of the least credit; and consequently, incapable of rendering the smallest service to the cause of the opposers of the perpetuity of Baptism, or yet to any other cause. Here also it may be noted, as another curious circumstance, that this pretended Jewish-Proselyte-rite, which some of the opposers of the perpetuity of Baptism have considered as a most substantial proof, that the ordinance ought not to be administered to the children or descendants of believers, has, on the other hand, been considered by some zealous, learned, and eminent Pædobaptists, as the main pillar of the right and title of such to the said ordinance. But it is impossible for either party to raise a solid argument on so rotten a foundation.

What has been said, it is presumed, makes it sufficiently clear, that the law of Baptism is not yet become obsolete, but remains still as binding as ever upon the disciples of Christ. But while we affirm this, and are fully persuaded of its truth, it behoves us to take good heed to the design and import of the ordinance, and never lose sight of that doctrine, or those truths which it is intended to hold forth to us, and impress upon our minds; to which if we are inattentive, our attachment to the institution itself, or our zeal for it, can be of but little avail or worth to us. If we consult the New Testament, we shall find in regard to Baptism,

1. That it represents the believer, or subject as assuming a new name, even that of Christ, or a Christian: hence the converts were baptized in, or into the name of the Lord Jesus, and are said to put on Christ, in this ordinance. This is an important idea, and well adapted to keep us in mind that Christ is our Lord and Master, and that we ought above all things to obey and follow him, even through evil as well as good report.

2. That it represents the convert or subject, not only as assuming, or sustaining a new name, but also as being a new creature or new man; so that the change is not merely nominal, but real, implying a change of mind and character, as well as of name. In other words, that it represents the convert, or subject as entering upon a new, holy, and divine life; and so it may be considered as a sign of regeneration, or that the person baptized is born from above, begotten of God, created anew, in

Christ Jesus, unto good works. John iii. 5. Rom. vi. 14. If Baptists are inattentive to the doctrine of the new birth, and to that of the new and divine life, or the obligation which the Gospel lays them under to walk in newness of life, conformably to their Saviour's doctrine and example, they must be more inexcusable than other men, seeing all that is strongly, and most solemnly inculcated upon them in their Baptism.

3. That it represents the remission, or washing away of his sins, as a privilege which the convert, or believer is now entered into the enjoyment of: accordingly Peter says to the convicted Jews, "Repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of the Lord Jesus, for the remission of sins;" and Ananias says to Paul, "Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord. Acts, ii. 38. xxii. 16.

4. That it also represents the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, together with the Christian's communion with, and conformity to him therein; as well as his firm belief of those facts, so important and interesting, as the principal grounds of his hope, and the main sources of his consolation, in this vale of sorrow and tears. Agreeably with this, are the Apostle's words to the Romans, "So many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into his death: therefore we are buried with him, by Baptism, into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection." To the same purpose he mentions also to the Colossians being "Buried with him in Baptism, wherein also you are risen with him, through the faith of the operation of God, who raised him from the dead. And you being dead in your sins, and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with Christ, having forgiven you all trespasses."

Attention to these things, brethren, ought to be carefully and constantly recommended among you, as an incumbent duty, and as likely means of increasing your earnestness in your Christian profession, and of leading you to act as becometh the Gospel, to be zealous of good works, to live soberly, righteously, and Godly in this present world, looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ. As Christianity excels all other religions, its professors may be expected to excel all other men, or at least to be daily and earnestly aiming at it. Christ is a perfect character, the most excellent of all teachers, and most worthy of being followed. Let the imitation of him be our constant

and chief concern. As connected with him, more may be expected from us than from other men. "What do ye more than others?" was a question he once put to his primitive disciples, and a question which evidently implied that more was certainly required of them than of others. As Protestants, there is more required of us than if we were Papists, or Roman Catholics; and as Protestant Dissenters, more still; and most of all, as Baptists, who profess to separate from Papists, from Protestant's Establishments or Hierarchies, and from other Protestant Dissenters, for the sake of Gospel purity, and unadulterated Christianity; or for the love of Christ, and in order to follow him, and adhere to the New Testament more closely and fully than what is done by the other religious denominations of our country. May it be your daily and constant care to give unequivocal evidence and full proof, that your religion consists not in word only, but in power; not merely in name, but also in reality; not in profession, or vain pretence, but in deed, and in truth. Thus shall you most effectually stop the mouths of gainsayers, and under the blessing of God, insure, through all the churches, a happy revival, and the restoration of real, permanent, and increasing prosperity. Amen.

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